



Dr. Maya Ward: The Spiritual, the Ecological, and the Pleasurable:
from Cultural Aversion to Collective Embodiment: a Movement and Ideas Workshop



Maya Ward is passionate about deepening the connections between body, ecology, and culture, through writing, dancing, and tending the earth. She co-creates pilgrimage-based rituals, runs contact improvisation dance classes, grows food, and replants forest with her home community. In this presentation, Maya takes us on a walking journey of the land where she lives, introducing us to the Yarra River, teaching about embodied elements of her life including permaculture, and engaging in contact improvisation in nature.

TOP EMBODIMENT TIP: Find the pleasure; Finding pleasure is really about releasing fear, which brings you into your whole body. Lean into your own flesh; there's deep pleasure there.

Welcome to the Yarra River: A Site That has Deep Meaning.

- The Yarra River is called the “River of Mist and Shadows”.
- This was the site of her 22-day pilgrimage, from the seed of the river to its source, which she details in her memoir, *The Comfort of Water: A River Pilgrimage*.
- She completed this journey as her own personal gesture of reconciliation, and she learned lessons upon this walk that have become her life's work.

The Lesson Learned: A Deep Appreciation of Connectedness.

- Along the journey, developed a profound understanding of the timeless pattern of the flowing river.
- Becoming deeply aware of the ancient nature of the river, and the appreciation that this was the river her ancestors witnessed and experienced, too.
- This river existed before us and preceded the language used to describe it. Maya deeply understood, too, that our bodies have been shaped by the land. We evolved with the Earth; we evolved as the Earth. Our body is the Earth. There is no separation. When we are deeply embodied, we can fully feel how everything is alive and connected.

Embodied Life Design: Intentional Choices to Honour Embodiment and Connection to Nature.

- Maya engages in permaculture, the intentional planting of permanent agriculture and culture.
- She intentionally built a home to honor her embodiment, a place where her body feels good and in union with nature.
- With her community, Maya engages in contact improvisation, a form of dance that invites touch, movement, and interplay between humans (animal-animal) or humans and the more-than-human world (animal-tree).

Resources:

- ❖ **Books:** *The Comfort of Water: A River Pilgrimage*, Transit Lounge, 2013.
- ❖ **Courses:** [Soul Dance Presents; Grief Passion Action](#)
- ❖ **Website:** [Maya Ward](#).



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The initiative was founded by Nicoleta Carpineanu (aka Nico de Transilvania), a Romanian, UK-based DJ/Producer who grew up in the forests of Transylvania. We began our first key project in Romania in April 2019 and in our first year planted over 25,000 trees. We reforest land that has been clear-cut, where natural reforestation would not occur. We only plant native, biodiverse species, grown locally and cared for until maturity in legally protected areas, adjacent to existing natural forests. Our aim is to plant one million trees in the Carpathians and beyond by 2025.

OUR MISSION is to preserve our forests and the people and wildlife they nurture, and to promote connection with nature through music, art, and culture.